

DESIGNING A COLLABORATIVE LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: BRIDGING INSTITUTIONAL AND RELATIONAL GAPS

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Abstract

Amidst Vietnam's strategic push towards sustainable tourism, integrating local food into the tourism supply chain emerges as a pivotal strategy for enhancing visitor experiences and bolstering community livelihoods. This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey of 150 tourists with in-depth interviews with 10 key stakeholders from restaurants and local suppliers in Cua Lo (Nghe An), to examine the disparity between market expectations and the supply chain's operational capacity. Findings reveal that while tourists highly appreciate local food for its quality and authenticity and articulate a strong demand for traceability, the existing supply chain remains fragmented. It is characterized by poor information flow, low stakeholder trust, and inadequate logistics. Consequently, this research proposes a voluntary, cooperative pilot model, titled "From Farm/Sea to Table," designed to overcome systemic bottlenecks, fortify supply-demand linkages, and foster value co-creation within the local tourism ecosystem. The study concludes by drawing theoretical and practical implications to guide the model's implementation and replication within the unique context of Vietnam.

Keywords: Food Supply Chain, Sustainable Tourism, Local Linkages, Value Co-creation, Cua Lo.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sustainable tourism has been established as a pivotal direction in the development strategies of numerous localities across Vietnam. Against this backdrop, local food is increasingly recognized as a key element for enhancing the visitor experience while generating positive economic, social, and environmental impacts. Integrating local food into the tourism supply chain not only helps preserve distinctive culinary heritage but also fosters crucial linkages between the agricultural and service sectors, thereby maximizing benefits for the local community (Sims, 2009; Mgonja, 2015). However, in many developing destinations like Cua Lo (Nghe An province), this integration process is fraught with challenges, including inadequate logistics infrastructure, small-scale production, and a lack of effective connectivity among relevant stakeholders.

While a substantial body of international research has explored the role of local food in elevating the tourism experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Sims, 2009), it has predominantly focused on the consumer perspective. The supply-side dynamics, particularly the relationship between restaurants and suppliers, remain significantly underexplored, especially within the context of developing nations. Although studies by Torres & Momsen (2004) and Roy et al. (2019) have identified common barriers such as high transportation costs, inconsistent quality, and information asymmetry, the unique context of Vietnam—where informal economic relationships are prevalent—demands more tailored approaches. In Cua Lo, the phenomenon of "information opacity," a deficit of trust, and the absence of formal cooperative mechanisms are identified as primary factors disrupting the value flow in the food-tourism supply chain. However, there remains a scarcity of empirical evidence to thoroughly analyze these root causes and the potential for improvement.

Grounded in this context, this study seeks to explore the factors influencing the integration of local food into the tourism supply chain in Cua Lo from a multi-stakeholder perspective. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines a quantitative survey of 150 tourists with 10 in-depth interviews with restaurant and supplier representatives, the study examines perceptions and expectations from the demand side, alongside operational barriers from the supply side. Based on these insights, the research proposes a pilot linkage model, "From Farm/Sea to Table," as an initial framework to foster enhanced coordination under specific local conditions.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the theoretical underpinnings and analytical framework. Section 3 details the research methodology and data collection process. Section 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative findings. Section 5 discusses these findings, drawing out theoretical and practical implications and proposing the pilot linkage model. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is conceptually grounded in the intersecting fields of sustainable tourism, stakeholder theory, and the dynamics of local food supply chains. This section reviews these theoretical foundations to construct a comprehensive analytical framework for the research problem.

2.1. Sustainable Tourism and Stakeholder Engagement

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that "takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, 2013). This concept is anchored in the three core pillars of sustainable development (WCED, 1987): economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability. Mgonja (2015) posits that the success of sustainable tourism hinges not on optimizing individual elements in isolation, but on the ability to balance and integrate all three dimensions.

However, translating these principles into practice is fraught with challenges, particularly in environments characterized by diverse and often conflicting stakeholder interests. According to Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory, the viability of any system depends not only on its economic performance but also on its capacity to reconcile the interests of all affiliated groups. In tourism, these stakeholders typically encompass government bodies, private enterprises, local communities, tourists, and intermediary organizations. Waligo et al. (2013) underscore that ineffective coordination or a lack of meaningful engagement among these groups can pose significant impediments to achieving sustainability objectives. Consequently, the establishment of a reliable collaborative framework that facilitates dialogue and information sharing is deemed a prerequisite for sustainable tourism development.

2.2. Local Food and the Tourism Supply Chain

The concept of "local food" lacks a universal definition but is commonly understood as food characterized by short geographical distances between production and consumption, direct producer-consumer relationships, and an embodiment of regional cultural identity (Martinez et al., 2010; Dunne et al., 2011). In tourism, local food transcends its material form to assume symbolic significance, acting as a "cultural ambassador" that connects visitors to a destination (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). As Sims (2009) suggests, the consumption of local food can fulfill the tourist's quest for authenticity, thereby enhancing satisfaction and encouraging repeat visitation.

The integration of local food into the tourism supply chain can generate value across all three pillars of sustainability. Economically, it helps retain added value within the local economy, creates stable markets for farmers, and lessens reliance on imported goods (Telfer & Wall, 2000; Mgonja, 2015). Socio-culturally, it aids in the preservation of traditional culinary heritage and strengthens community cohesion. Environmentally, shorter supply chains contribute to reduced carbon footprints and are often associated with more eco-friendly production methods (Gössling et al., 2011).

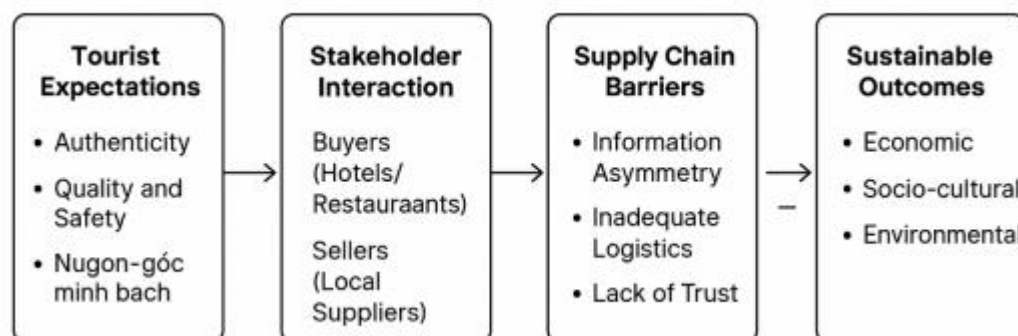
Nonetheless, the literature consistently indicates that establishing an effective local food supply chain for tourism is a complex endeavor. Common challenges stem from seasonality, small-scale operations, inadequate infrastructure, and limited cooperative partnerships (Torres & Momsen, 2004; Roy et al., 2019). Moreover, a deficit of trust between buyers and sellers, asymmetric market information, and the absence of formal collaborative mechanisms are identified as primary impediments leading to supply chain fragmentation and inefficiency (Waligo et al., 2013).

2.3. Research Framework: Bridging Market Demand and Supply-Side Capabilities

Drawing upon the theoretical review, this study approaches the research problem through a three-pronged analytical lens: (1) tourist needs and perceptions (the demand side), (2) the realities and challenges of the supply chain (the supply side), and (3) the capacity for stakeholder coordination. This structure enables a holistic assessment of both market drivers and implementation conditions, while simultaneously analyzing the role of relational factors in

shaping an effective supply chain—particularly in a distinctive context like Cua Lo, where cooperation remains largely informal and trust-dependent.

This framework also provides a conduit to the theory of Value Co-Creation (VCC), which posits that value is not unilaterally created but emerges from the interactions among actors within a network. In situations where effective coordination is absent, as seen in fragmented models, a failure to co-create a sustainable tourism experience can occur, even in the presence of clear market demand.



3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, specifically a sequential explanatory design. This approach unfolds in two distinct phases: an initial quantitative phase to identify broad trends, followed by a qualitative phase where the initial findings are elaborated upon and contextualized. This design is particularly well-suited for research that seeks to both measure widespread behaviors and perceptions and to delve deeply into the underlying motivations and barriers from a stakeholder perspective (Creswell, 2014).

In the first phase, a quantitative survey was administered to gauge tourist awareness, satisfaction, and consumption patterns related to local food in Cua Lo. The resulting data helped to identify salient issues and the gap between market expectations and real-world experiences, thereby informing the subsequent qualitative inquiry.

The second phase involved in-depth interviews with key actors within the supply chain—namely, restaurant/hotel managers and local suppliers—to explore the factors impeding the integration of local food into the tourism ecosystem. This qualitative analysis enables a nuanced exploration of hard-to-quantify variables such as collaborative dynamics, levels of trust, information asymmetry, and operational hurdles, all of which are posited to significantly affect supply chain performance yet are often missed by quantitative metrics.

The integration of these methods not only lends comprehensiveness to the study but also fosters a richer understanding of the local context, which in turn underpins the formulation of viable solutions. The proposed "From Farm/Sea to Table" linkage model is thus a direct

outcome of synthesizing these two data streams, reflecting a pragmatic, evidence-based approach.

3.2. Data Collection

Field-based data collection was conducted within the Cua Lo tourist area and its adjacent communes in Nghe An province between May and June 2025.

3.2.1. *Quantitative Phase: Tourist Survey*

The sample comprised 150 domestic and international tourists. A convenience sampling technique was utilized at high-traffic tourist hubs, including the central square and the lobbies of several major hotels. This method facilitated direct access to subjects currently engaged in the consumption experience, ensuring that the data accurately reflect the real-world context of local food consumption in a tourism setting.

The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire featuring a 5-point Likert scale to measure variables concerning tourist perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a pilot group of 10 individuals to ensure clarity and local applicability, with minor revisions made to the wording based on their feedback.

Data collectors approached potential participants directly, outlined the research objectives, and assured them of their rights and the confidentiality of their responses. To enhance sample diversity, data collection was performed at various times throughout the day. This quantitative phase provided not only a macro-level overview of market preferences but also served to strategically guide the development of the in-depth interview protocol for the next phase.

3.2.2. *Qualitative Phase: Stakeholder In-depth Interviews*

Informed by the preliminary quantitative findings, the study proceeded to conduct in-depth interviews with 10 pivotal stakeholders within the Cua Lo food supply chain. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants possessing extensive, first-hand knowledge of food supply operations for the tourism sector. This sample included five restaurant or hotel managers and five local suppliers, encompassing both primary producers (farmers) and small-scale processors.

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized, featuring open-ended questions focused on key domains such as procurement and supply logistics, quality control challenges, pricing mechanisms, and inter-stakeholder collaboration. Each interview, averaging 45–60 minutes in duration, was audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participant. All interviews were conducted on-site by members of the research team.

The data gathered in this phase were instrumental in contextualizing the trends identified in the survey, providing a rich, detailed understanding of the relational and operational barriers within the food-tourism supply chain.

3.3. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from 150 completed surveys were coded and analyzed using SPSS software. The analysis primarily involved descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) to summarize the demographic profile of the sample and to quantify tourist perceptions of local food attributes.

For the qualitative data, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. The resulting texts were then subjected to a thematic analysis following the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical process centered on identifying recurrent themes by systematically comparing the perspectives of the two primary stakeholder groups: restaurants (buyers) and suppliers (sellers). Points of convergence, divergence, and conflict were carefully documented to pinpoint the critical bottlenecks within the local food-tourism linkage chain.

3.4. Research Limitations

Although this study was carefully designed, it has several limitations. Firstly, the reliance on a convenience sample for the quantitative data may reduce the extent to which the results can be generalized to all tourists in Cua Lo. Secondly, the qualitative sample size (N=10), while offering valuable insights, is exploratory and cannot be considered representative of all relevant stakeholders. Future studies with larger, randomly selected samples are needed to corroborate and build upon these initial findings.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Tourist Perceptions and Expectations of Local Food

The quantitative data gathered from 150 tourists in Cua Lo provide a clear illustration of the target market's demands and perceptions. The demographic profile of the survey sample is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Sample (N=150)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	70	46.7%
	Female	80	53.3%
Age Group	18–34	75	50.0%
	35–54	65	43.3%
	55 and above	10	6.7%
Nationality	Vietnamese	138	92.0%
	International	12	8.0%
Monthly Income	Below 20 million VND	80	53.3%
	Above 20 million VND	70	46.7%

Source: Author's survey (2025)

The analysis of tourist perceptions (Table 2) reveals a high valuation of the core attributes of local food, particularly its sensory qualities and cultural authenticity. Respondents rated local dishes as very fresh and delicious ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.65$) and possessing a unique, distinct flavor ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.71$). Furthermore, a strong consensus emerged that consuming local cuisine deepens their understanding of the indigenous culture ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.75$) and constitutes an authentic component of their travel experience ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.82$).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Tourist Perceptions of Local Food ($N=150$)

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement on Local Food	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
a. Is very fresh and delicious	4.45	0.65
b. Unique and distinctive flavor	4.30	0.71
c. Enhances cultural understanding	4.25	0.75
d. Represents an authentic tourism experience	4.10	0.82
h. Reasonably priced	3.80	0.88
e. Trust in food safety and hygiene	3.40	0.95
g. Easy to find	3.15	1.05
f. Clear information on origin and provenance	2.85	1.10

Source: Author's survey (2025)

However, a stark contrast appears when examining factors related to trust and accessibility (Figure 1). Tourist confidence in food hygiene and safety was merely moderate ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.95$), and they reported a pronounced lack of information regarding product origin and provenance ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.10$). Similarly, the availability of local specialties was perceived as limited ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.05$). These disparities highlight a significant gap between the perceived value (quality and cultural depth) and the tangible value (reliability and convenience) in the tourist's local food consumption experience.

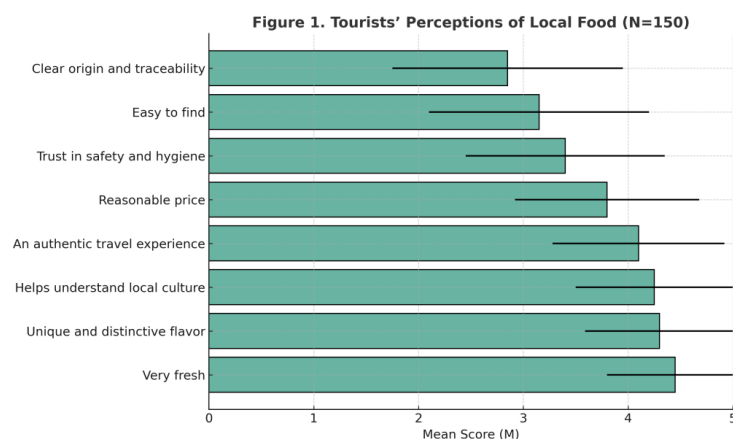


Figure 1. Tourists' Mean Perception Scores for Local Food Attributes ($N=150$)

Source: Author's survey (2025)

4.2. Supply Chain Barriers: Stakeholder Perspectives

The qualitative analysis of 10 in-depth interviews with restaurant managers and local suppliers elucidated the root causes underlying the statistical findings. This analysis identified three overarching themes that reflect the fragmented linkages and systemic barriers within the Cua Lo food-tourism supply chain.

4.2.1. Information Opacity and Communication Gaps

A foundational barrier cited by both restaurateurs and suppliers is the absence of an effective communication channel. This deficit results in a scenario where suppliers lack a clear understanding of buyer-specific requirements, while buyers remain unaware of available products, rendering transactions sporadic and haphazard. This exemplifies the "information asymmetry" problem central to Stakeholder Theory, where a lack of transparency impedes effective collaboration.

"We require approximately 50kg of premium fresh seafood daily, but a consistent source is non-existent. We find ourselves calling one person today and searching for another tomorrow. It is incredibly time-consuming and risky. A centralized platform detailing daily availability and quality would be invaluable." (Restaurant Manager H3)

From the opposite perspective, local suppliers conveyed a sense of reactivity, stemming from a lack of concrete demand information from tourism enterprises.

"We cultivate organic shrimp but primarily sell to traders because we are uncertain about the specific standards and volumes large restaurants demand. There are times they need an urgent order we cannot fulfill, and other times we have a surplus they do not procure." (Supplier N2)

These testimonies underscore a prevailing reality of piecemeal and unsystematic transactions, devoid of an effective intermediary to coordinate the bidirectional flow of information. This "information opacity" not only undermines operational efficiency but also generates significant waste, thereby constraining value co-creation between producers and restaurateurs.

4.2.2. Deficiencies in Quality Consistency and Logistics

A major operational challenge within the Cua Lo food supply chain is inconsistent product quality and a deficient logistics infrastructure. Restaurants, particularly those catering to large groups or upscale clientele, demand high levels of consistency in both quality and delivery schedules—a requirement that small-scale local producers struggle to meet.

"The primary issue is consistency. The vegetables delivered today might be excellent, but tomorrow's batch is entirely different. We cannot feature an item on our permanent menu without a guaranteed supply. Furthermore, deliveries are frequently delayed, disrupting our entire kitchen workflow." (Hotel Head Chef K1)

Suppliers conceded these challenges, attributing them primarily to a lack of essential infrastructure for product preservation and transportation.

"Our catch must be sold the same day, as we lack cold storage facilities. Transportation is another major hurdle; in hot weather, quality deteriorates rapidly over long distances. A centralized collection point equipped with refrigeration would be a game-changer." (Supplier N4)

These infrastructural deficits not only compromise the quality of the final product but also foster a reluctance among restaurants to commit to long-term partnerships with local suppliers. This, in turn, exacerbates supply chain instability and impedes the sustainable integration of local food into the region's tourism sector, directly hindering the fulfillment of its economic and environmental sustainability goals.

4.2.3. Price Volatility and Trust Deficit

Price instability and a mutual lack of trust constitute critical relational barriers, creating a self-perpetuating cycle within the Cua Lo food supply chain. Restaurateurs often engage in direct price comparisons between local producers and established middlemen, while producers are wary of price manipulation and payment defaults, particularly in the absence of formal contracts.

"On occasion, when we contact farmers directly, their quoted price is higher than that of a middleman who provides door-to-door delivery. We appreciate their effort, but as a business, we must be cost-conscious." (Restaurant Manager H2)

Conversely, suppliers expressed reservations about direct dealings with large establishments due to concerns over credit terms and delayed payments.

"Selling to a trader is cash-on-delivery, even if the price is lower. Our greatest fear with large restaurants is accounts receivable. Delayed payments cripple our cash flow and ability to reinvest." (Supplier N1)

The absence of formal collaborative frameworks, such as stable procurement agreements or platforms for structured dialogue, has intensified this mutual distrust. Consequently, both parties often resort to the "safer" alternative of traditional intermediaries, despite acknowledging the suboptimal economic outcomes. This dynamic not only erodes the potential benefits for individual actors but also stifles the sustainable development of the local food-tourism supply chain. It vividly illustrates how a deficit of "trust," a cornerstone of Stakeholder Theory, serves as the most significant impediment to value co-creation within this ecosystem.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings presented in the preceding section not only paint a picture of the current food supply chain serving tourism in Cua Lo but also unveil its underlying dynamics, internal contradictions, and significant opportunities for systemic improvement. These findings reveal that the supply chain is not merely a technical or organizational matter but rather a complex intersection of market expectations, operational capacity, and inter-stakeholder relationships. The following discussion delves into the implications of these results, contextualizing them

within the broader international literature and drawing out theoretical and practical insights for constructing a sustainable food supply chain in the tourism sector.

5.1. The Gap between Market Expectations and Current Supply-Side Capabilities

The study's most striking finding is the existence of a substantial "opportunity gap," stemming from a profound mismatch between the demand side (tourists) and the supply side (the supply chain). The quantitative data unequivocally demonstrate that tourists not only consider local food an integral part of their travel experience ($M > 4.1$) but also articulate a clear expectation for origin transparency and a willingness to pay a premium for products that meet this criterion. This represents a highly positive market signal, indicating considerable untapped economic potential.

However, when juxtaposed with the qualitative data, the reality of the supply chain presents a starkly contrasting picture. Systemic barriers, including "information opacity," logistical deficiencies, and a deficit of trust among stakeholders, have resulted in a fragmented supply chain that lacks the capacity to meet the market's increasingly sophisticated expectations. This paradox constitutes both the primary challenge and the greatest opportunity.

This finding particularly reinforces and extends the concept of Value Co-creation (VCC) within the tourism food supply chain context. Rather than being a seamless collaborative process, "information opacity" and a lack of trust have prevented stakeholders from effectively co-creating and sharing value. While tourists are prepared to pay for transparency and quality, the current supply chain is incapable of "co-creating" this value due to severe interaction breakdowns. This indicates that the core issue lies not with demand—which is clearly articulated by tourists—but with the fractured linkages among supply-side actors. Consequently, establishing an effective coordination mechanism among stakeholders is the key to unlocking the full potential of local food for sustainable tourism development in Cua Lo.

5.2. Contextual Differences and Vietnam's Unique Factors

When situating the findings of this research within the international literature, numerous parallels become apparent, yet notable distinctions also surface, vividly reflecting the unique characteristics of the Vietnamese context. Consistent with conclusions from studies in other developing economies, such as those by Mgonja (2015) in Tanzania and Torres & Momsen (2004), challenges pertaining to inadequate infrastructure, high seasonality, and small-scale production are affirmed as foundational barriers in Vietnam.

However, the pivotal distinction—and a key contribution of this study—lies in its emphasis on the centrality of relational barriers, particularly "trust" and "credit/debt concerns." While research in developed nations, such as the Canadian case study by Roy et al. (2019), tends to prioritize operational factors like logistics, quality standardization, or supply chain efficiency, the case of Cua Lo reveals that "trust" and "informal institutions" emerge as the most decisive determinants. This finding extends Stakeholder Theory by positing that in emerging economies, "soft infrastructure" such as trust and dialogue mechanisms is not merely important but may, in fact, be a prerequisite for investment in "hard infrastructure."

A subtle yet critical distinction is the role of payment-related issues in eroding trust. While international studies often treat contracts and on-time delivery as primary indicators of effective collaboration, the Vietnamese context highlights that the fear of capital lock-up and delayed payments constitutes a formidable psychological and economic impediment, particularly for small-scale suppliers with constrained cash flow.

These differences suggest that to construct a sustainable food supply chain for Vietnam's tourism sector, investing in "soft infrastructure"—including trust-building initiatives, dialogue platforms, and shared codes of conduct—is an essential precondition, potentially even more critical and urgent than investing in "hard infrastructure" like cold storage systems or transport networks. This powerfully reinforces the thesis that inter-stakeholder interactions and relationships are the ultimate determinants of sustainable supply chain success.

5.3. Implications and a Proposed Pilot Model

5.3.1. Theoretical Implications

This study offers empirical validation for Stakeholder Theory, demonstrating that the failure to accommodate the interests of one stakeholder group—in this case, local suppliers—can undermine the entire supply chain. Findings on the trust deficit and information asymmetry between restaurants and suppliers attest to the critical role of stakeholder relationship management in achieving sustainability.

Furthermore, the research elucidates the concept of Value Co-Creation (VCC), positing that supply chain breakdowns are not merely technical failures but rather reflect a collective inability of stakeholders to co-create and distribute value. Without effective linkages, the tourist experience remains incomplete, restaurants fail to achieve meaningful differentiation, and suppliers are denied equitable returns.

Consequently, this study advocates for a paradigm shift from linear supply chain thinking to a multi-dimensional value network perspective, where actors interact and collaborate on a foundation of mutual trust. This approach broadens the interpretation of VCC, emphasizing that the co-creation of shared value necessitates concurrently addressing both relational and trust-based barriers.

5.3.2. Practical Implications

For policymakers and local authorities, this research provides tangible evidence that investing in hard infrastructure—such as roads, cold storage, and transport—is necessary but insufficient for building a sustainable supply chain. More critically, investment in 'soft infrastructure' is required. This includes establishing information-sharing platforms, facilitating regular stakeholder dialogues, and enacting policies that foster cooperation.

For tourism enterprises like restaurants and hotels, the study suggests that proactively forging long-term, trust-based partnerships with local suppliers is not merely an act of corporate social responsibility but an astute strategic move. It is a means to create a competitive

advantage rooted in authenticity, local identity, and sustainability—qualities that hold increasing appeal for modern tourists.

For local suppliers—particularly farmers, fishers, and small-scale processors—collective action through cooperatives or informal groups is identified as imperative. This enhances their bargaining power, improves quality consistency, lowers logistical costs, and ultimately, increases their access to stable, long-term markets.

5.3.3. A Proposed Pilot Model: "From Farm/Sea to a Sustainable Table"

Drawing from the research findings, a pilot cooperative model is proposed, designed around a voluntary, bottom-up approach rather than top-down administrative mandates. The model is centered on trust-building and facilitates the joint participation of key stakeholders—local suppliers, tourism businesses, and facilitating organizations—in the value co-creation process. Its flexible and transparent framework is intended to be applicable not only in Cua Lo but also adaptable and replicable in other destinations with similar characteristics.

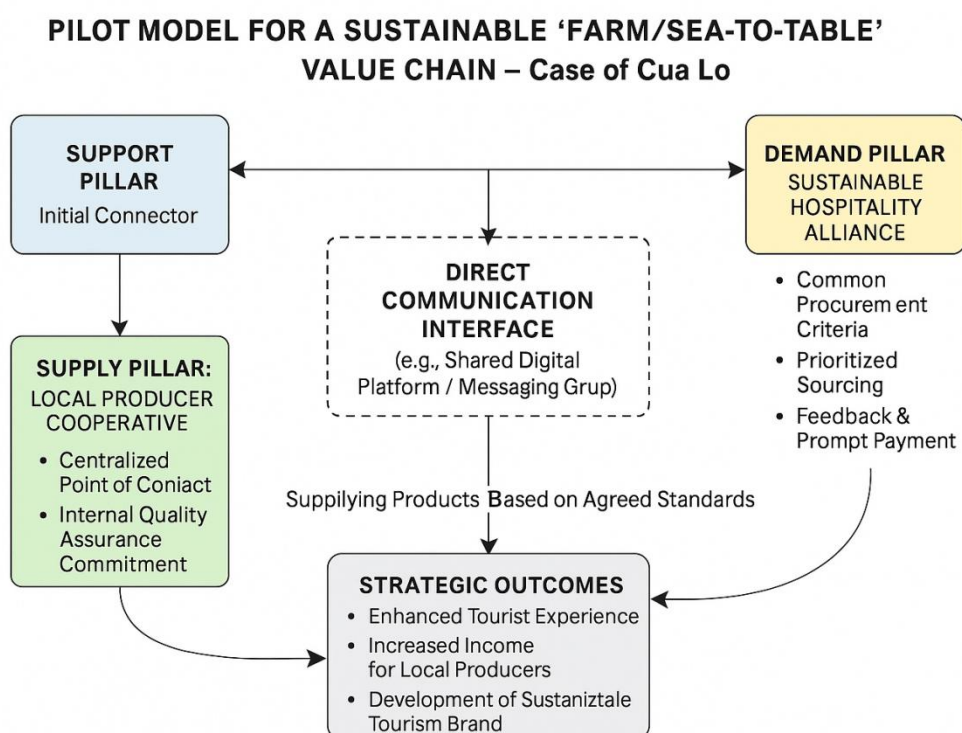


Figure 2. The "From Farm/Sea to a Sustainable Table" Pilot Cooperative Model

Source: Proposed by the author

The model is architected on three core pillars that operate within a coordinated ecosystem, unified by a transparent communication mechanism:

The Supply Pillar: A Supplier Cooperative. To overcome supply fragmentation, a vanguard of farmers and fishers would form a voluntary cooperative. This entity would feature

a designated coordinator to serve as the single point of contact for buyers, establish internal quality benchmarks, and manage daily updates on product availability.

The Demand Pillar: A Sustainable Restaurant Alliance. To generate stable demand, Cua Lo's restaurants and hotels would form an alliance, committing to prioritize procurement from the Supplier Cooperative, contingent upon meeting pre-agreed quality standards. The alliance would also guarantee prompt payment mechanisms and provide transparent, constructive feedback on product quality.

The Facilitation Pillar: To catalyze and sustain the model, a third-party facilitator is essential. The Cua Lo Tourism Association could serve as the initial convenor, trust-builder, and promoter for participants. The local government would play a crucial supportive role, offering technical and food safety training and advancing policies for targeted infrastructure investments.

The model's central nervous system is a "Real-time Communication Platform" (e.g., a shared messaging group), where all information regarding product availability, orders, and pricing is updated transparently. This mechanism is designed to minimize reliance on inefficient intermediaries and rebuild inter-stakeholder trust through real-time, transparent interaction.

6. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study addressed the central question of how to sustainably integrate local food into the tourism supply chain in Cua Lo, yielding three principal conclusions. First, on the demand side, tourists exhibit a clear and robust demand for local culinary experiences. They place a high value on product quality, cultural authenticity, and demonstrate a willingness to pay a premium for products with transparent and trustworthy origins. Second, the existing supply chain is ill-equipped to meet these expectations due to systemic impediments. Beyond logistical constraints and inconsistent quality, this research elucidates critical relational challenges, including a lack of information sharing and an erosion of trust between supply-side and demand-side stakeholders. Third, this disparity between market demand and supply-side capabilities creates a substantial "opportunity gap," suggesting that establishing an effective collaborative framework among stakeholders is not merely a prerequisite for sustainable development but also a viable economic strategy for enhancing the value of local food in tourism.

Future research could profitably be pursued in several directions. First, there is a need to expand the research scope, both quantitatively and qualitatively, while employing more rigorous sampling methods, such as random or stratified sampling, to improve the data's reliability and generalizability. Second, a post-implementation impact assessment of the "From Farm/Sea to Table" pilot model is warranted. Measuring quantitative metrics related to economic outcomes (e.g., supplier income) and social impacts (e.g., tourist satisfaction and levels of inter-stakeholder trust) would be crucial for validating and refining the model prior to its replication. Third, the role of digital technologies in the food-tourism supply chain merits

deeper investigation. Digital platforms, mobile ordering and payment systems, and traceability technologies could significantly enhance transparency, improve coordination, and optimize operational efficiency. Finally, comparative case studies at other prominent tourist destinations in Vietnam, such as Sapa, Hoi An, or Phu Quoc, should be undertaken to evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the model's adaptability and effectiveness. Such comparisons would help identify the necessary conditions for tailoring and scaling the model in a sustainable and context-appropriate manner.

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